
**Ortega, B., "Del Valle Training Center Access Road Maintenance Project—
California Gnatcatcher Monitoring, County of Los Angeles, California"
(October 3, 2008)**

October 3, 2008

6153-01

Mr. Roger Root
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
6010 Hidden Valley Road
Carlsbad, California 92011

***Subject: Del Valle Training Center Access Road Maintenance Project—
California Gnatcatcher Monitoring, County of Los Angeles, California***

Dear Mr. Root:

This letter report summarizes the results of construction monitoring for California gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*; CAGN) conducted by Dudek at the Del Valle Training Center Access Road (project) site. The project involves improvements to an existing access road, located off of Chiquito Canyon Road in the County of Los Angeles, California. The project site is located south of the community of Val Verde, west of Chiquito Canyon Road, and northeast of the Del Valle Training Center (Figures 1 and 2). The project property is located on the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5 minute series, Val Verde Quadrangle, in Section 16, Township 4N, and Range 17W with elevations ranging from 324 to 399 meters above sea level (Figure 2). The project area is dominated by non-native annual grasslands, California sagebrush scrub, and California sagebrush – California buckwheat scrub.

The California gnatcatcher (CAGN) is a federally listed threatened species and a California Department of Fish and Game (USFWS) species of special concern. It is closely associated with coastal scrub habitats, particularly those that are dominated by California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*) and California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*). It typically occurs below 500 meters and on slopes less than 40 %. The species is threatened primarily by loss, degradation, and fragmentation of coastal scrub habitat and is also impacted by brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) nest parasitism (Atwood and Bontrager 2001).

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Methods

In accordance with the monitoring protocol approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service via email on August 14, 2008, Dudek biologist Traci Caddy conducted biological monitoring during construction on the access road from August 15 through September 4, 2008. Specifically, the agreed-upon monitoring conditions included the following:

- The biologist will be familiar with CAGN and familiar with monitoring CAGN activity.
- Monitoring will occur when road grading and brush clearing activities are occurring within 200 feet of suitable scrub habitat.
- Since CAGN are most active during the morning hours, where the above threshold is met, monitoring will occur from the time that construction begins until 1100 hours.
- If a CAGN comes within 200 feet of the activity, then the monitor will note it's travel vectors on an aerial photograph. At 5-minute intervals, the biologist will note its activity (foraging, preening, sitting, consuming prey, under cover, mewing, interspecific aggression, intraspecific aggression).
- If the biologist notes a prolonged period of mewing (i.e., 5 continuous minutes or during 3 consecutive 5-minute interval sampling periods) or other signs of CAGN distress, they will contact Brock Ortega (Dudek) and a determination will be made as to whether they are showing stress.
- If it is determined that they are stressed by the activity, then the biologist will stop work until the CAGN have left the area.
- Within 30 days of the conclusion of monitoring, Dudek will submit a report to the USFWS that includes: a regional, vicinity, and site map depicting any occurrences and directions of travel data; methods; 5-minute data; summary of observations; summary of measures taken; and future recommendations.

Traci Caddy, who is familiar with CAGN and familiar with monitoring CAGN activity, conducted monitoring during road grading and brush clearing activities occurring within 200 feet of suitable scrub habitat. Since CAGN are most active during the morning hours, monitoring occurred from the time that construction began to 1100 hours daily during construction activities.

If a gnatcatcher had been detected within 200 feet of the activity, then the biologist would have noted its travel vectors on an aerial photograph. At 5-minute intervals, the biologist

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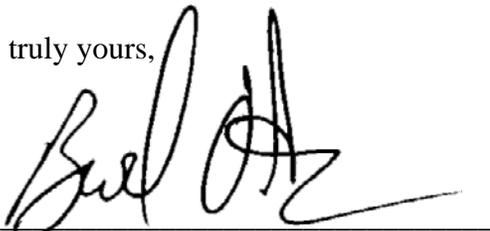
would have noted its activity (foraging, preening, sitting, consuming prey, under cover, mewing, interspecific aggression, intraspecific aggression), and if the biologist noted a prolonged period of mewing (i.e., 5 continuous minutes or during 3 consecutive 5-minute interval sampling periods) or other signs of CAGN distress then the biologist would have stopped work until the CAGN had left the area.

Results

CAGN were detected twice over the course of the 3-week monitoring. The gnatcatcher was first observed foraging in California sagebrush scrub during the original pre-construction nesting bird survey on August 8, 2008 (*Figure 2*) and then headed west. The gnatcatcher was observed foraging again near the project site again on August 15, 2008, in California sagebrush-California buckwheat scrub and then headed west. In both instances, the gnatcatcher was observed for less than 5 minutes and was vocalizing and then quickly disappeared. Gnatcatchers were not observed for the remainder of the 3-week monitoring and were not detected within 200 feet of construction activities.

Please contact me at 760.942.5147 if you have any questions regarding this report.

Very truly yours,



Brock A. Ortega
Senior Wildlife Biologist

*Cc: Sherri Miller, Dudek
Traci Caddy, Dudek
Ross Pistone, RP Development Services*

Att: Figures 1 and 2

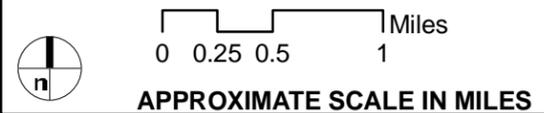
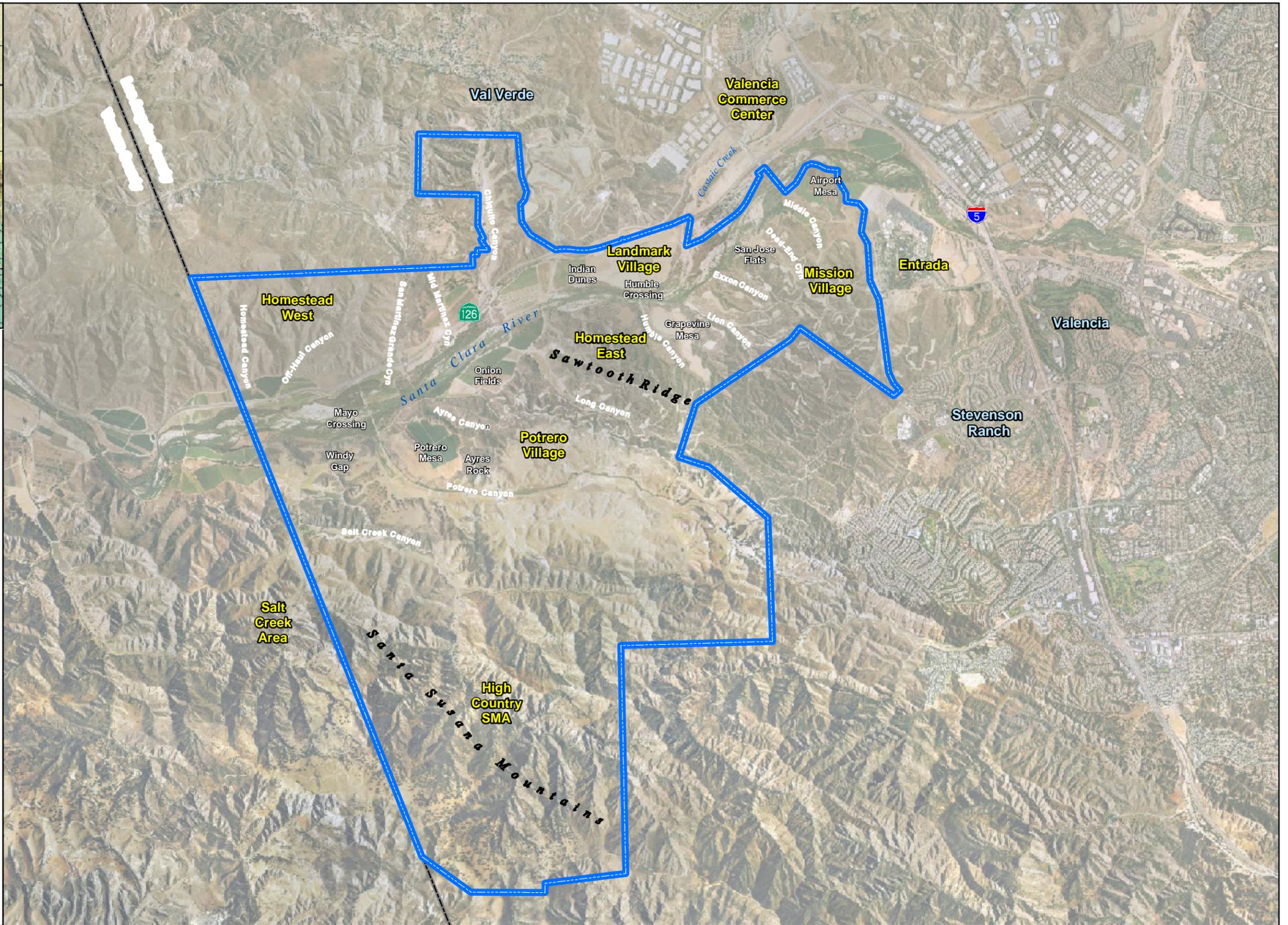
References

Atwood, Jonathan L. and David R. Bontrager. 2001. California Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online



Legend

-  Newhall Ranch Specific Plan Area
-  County Boundary



SOURCE:



FIGURE 1

Newhall Ranch
Regional - Vicinity Map

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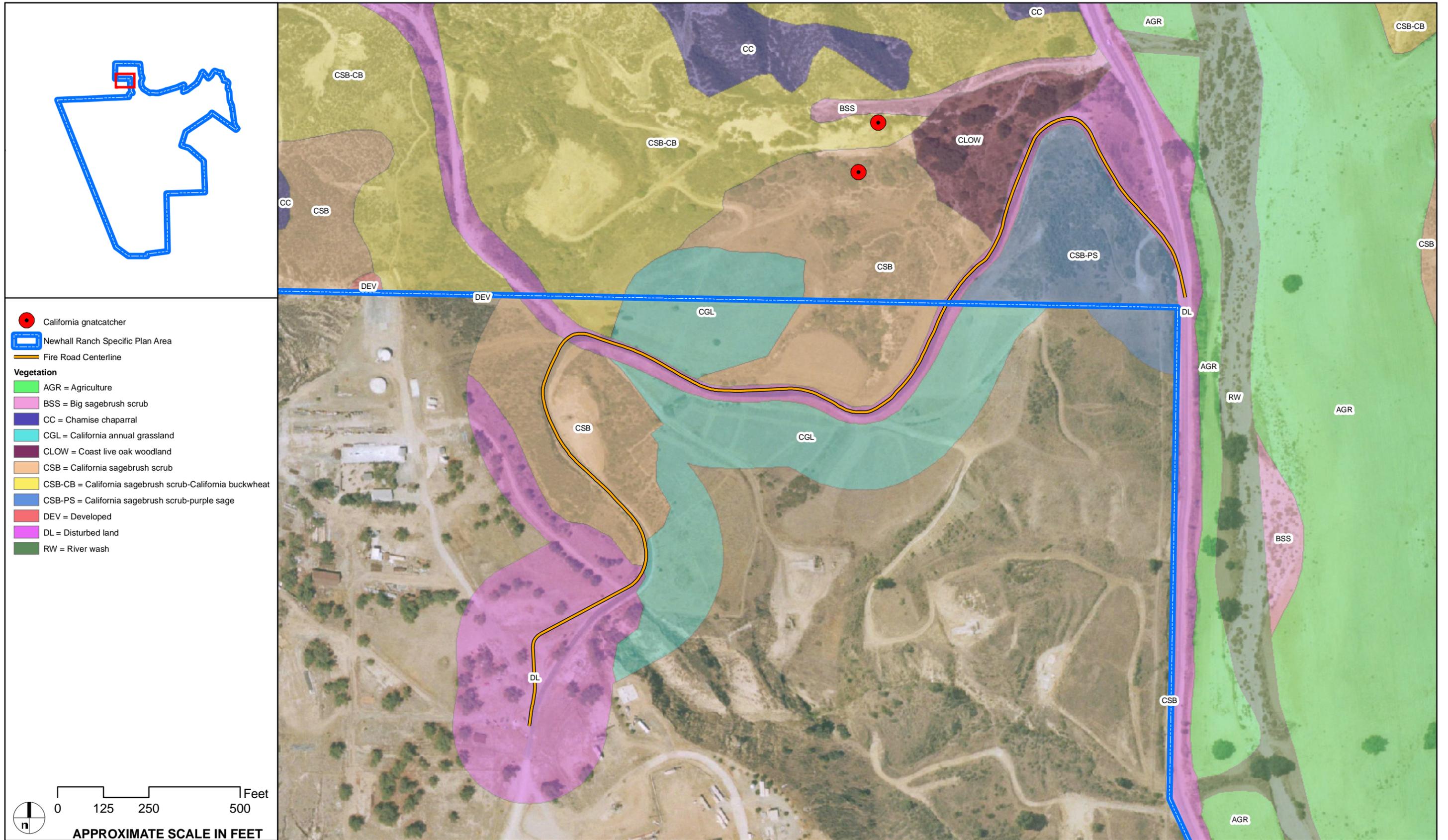


FIGURE 2

**Newhall Ranch
Fire Road**

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